

UNFIT FOR AMERICA: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BERNARR MACFADDEN'S
“WEAK CHILD” CLAIM IN AMERICAN PHYSICAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Unfit for America: The Significance of Bernarr Macfadden's "Weak Child"
Claim in American Physical Culture

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The "weak child" claim was a statement made by early physical culturalists in their publications in the early 20th century, wherein they claim to have been exceptionally weak or sickly as a child, and then, through "x" system of physical culture, became remarkably strong and fit. During the time period this claim was being made, eugenics began to influence the medical and legal environment in America. My thesis looks at the "weak child" claim through its American originator, Bernarr Macfadden, and examines its ties with eugenics through the medical and physical culture communities, as well as the general population to ascertain why it was such a prevalent method of advertising.

My thesis will characterize the knowledge of physical culturalists and medical professionals regarding common ailments at the time which would have rendered one a "weak child". I will then go on to characterize the influence of eugenics on American society through the medical and physical culture industry. Finally, my thesis will document some known "weak child" claims made by physical culturalists, as well as other people who helped bring the concept of eugenics into the field of physical culture, and how eugenics created a sense of fear in society which would make the "weak child" claim an attractive form of advertising for physical culturalists to take advantage of.

Introduction

America is gearing up for world conflict. A young man, Hugh Genics, has seen pictures in the newspaper, the Selective Service Act of 1917 was recently passed and he's buzzing with anticipation. America needs an army of able-bodied men to help turn the stalemate in the trenches in Europe. But there's a twinge of doubt in his side. He's always been a lanky boy, not a particular standout in athletic competitions. He looks nothing like those circus strongmen who visited his small town in Virginia last fall. He's also chronically constipated, and suffers anxiety stemming from neurasthenia, something the doctor told him was caused by overstimulation of the nerves. He has a whole five dollars saved from doing odd jobs around town during the summer. Hugh wants to go in one last time to get checked by the local doctor. Maybe going to the doctor one more time could rid him of his health issues and make him strong and ready to serve his country, but the three dollar payment for a full physical seems too steep. The laudanum he prescribed last time just made Hugh sleepy anyway. While buying a soda at the drug store he spots the latest copy of *Physical Culture* magazine sitting in one of the racks. The illustrations of strong bodies on the cover pique his interest, he opens the cover to an ad telling him "Don't Be a Chronic Weakling." The well-muscled man in the ad claims to sell a natural form of healing and strength, one which does not require medicine and can treat nearly any ailment he may suffer from, including his constipation and neurasthenia. The man in the ad also claims to have been weak as a child, something that Hugh can relate to in his current physical state. Hugh decides to save his three dollars and opt, instead, for buying the fifteen cent copy of *Physical Culture* magazine. He hopes the many pages of ads and articles will reveal the secrets to strength and health exemplified by the strong bodies on the front cover of the magazine.

The scenario above is an example of how the “weak-child” claim would have been used in the early 20th century as an effective form of advertisement for physical culturalists. There were many social, scientific, and medical changes that took place in fin-de-siècle America that made it an attractive claim for physical cultural entrepreneurs. The most prominent individual to make the “weak child” claim in America was Bernarr Macfadden (the founder of the most widely circulated American fitness magazine in the early 20th century, *Physical Culture*, claiming over 110,000 individual copies sold within its first year of publication alone.)¹ The purpose of this thesis is to identify the factors that made the “weak child” claim an effective method of advertising fitness products and exercise systems. These factors include the knowledge of the general public, the doctors who competed with physical culturalists and fitness “experts” for the same customers, and the physical culturalists like Bernarr Macfadden. This thesis also takes a critical look at the role of eugenics in the United States in popularizing the “weak-child” claim from a medical, physical cultural, and societal perspective in the early 20th century.

Before moving on to the analysis, it is important to get a grasp of the research methods, jargon and concepts frequently mentioned in this thesis. This thesis is a historical analysis, gathered from relevant literature, film, and texts prevalent during the late 19th and early 20th century. Secondary sources are used to provide framework for the arguments.

¹ Robert Ernst, Weakness is a Crime: The Life of Bernarr Macfadden (New York: Adelphi University Press, 1991), 25.

Research Methods

Most of the primary sources listed in this thesis were accessed in the H.J. Lutzer Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports at the University of Texas at Austin. Research was confined to two separate collections: the Ottley Coulter Collection fitness pamphlet and manual collection, and the nearly complete *Physical Culture* magazine collection.² While most of the research was completed using the archives listed above in the Stark Center, other relevant primary resources were found on various online academic databases cited in the footnotes. Unless otherwise noted in the footnotes, documents included in this thesis came from these two collections in the Stark Center.

Frequently Used Jargon

Physical culture pertains to a health and strength training movement that originated in 19th century Germany, England, and the United States.³ Physical culturalists is a broad term that refers to anyone practicing or selling fitness and health equipment in any of these countries during the 19th and early 20th century. Doctors who practice medicine are not considered physical culturalists unless they align themselves with a certain system of physical culture. Bernarr MacFadden was the dominant physical culturalist in the United States, due to the popularity of his magazine, aptly titled *Physical Culture*.

² Ottley Coulter Pamphlet and Manual Collection & *Physical Culture* magazine Collection, H.J Lutzer Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, University of Texas at Austin.

³ Shelly McKenzie, Getting Physical: The Rise of Fitness Culture in America (Kansas: University of Kansas Press 2013)

Muscular Christianity was a social gospel that gained momentum in the 1860s in America and Great Britain. Muscular Christianity affirmed the compatibility of the robust physical life with the life of Christian morality and service, contending that bodily strength built character and righteousness that transferred into usefulness for God (and the nation's) work.⁴ Muscular Christianity was responsible for wedding the religious life with the athletic life in late 19th and early 20th century America and Great Britain. It is still a prevalent theme in American athletics to this day (think religious players like Tim Tebow, and organizations like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.)

The term “medical professional” is used in this thesis to define someone who has had professional medical training at a university institution. While there were professionally trained doctors who aligned themselves with the physical culture movement, the term “medical professionals” as used in this thesis does not include these people. The American Medical Association (AMA) and its literature, *The Journal of The American Medical Association* (JAMA), form the governing organization and characterize the collective consciousness of medical professionals in America at any given point in this thesis.

Defining the “Weak Child” Claim

The “weak child” claim refers to a series of similar claims made by physical culturalists in the early 20th century wherein they claimed to have been exceptionally weak or sick as a child or young adult, and through “x” system of physical culture, they became living examples of

⁴ Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978), 107-119, 149-57.

masculine musculature and health. The claim was popularized by Bernarr Macfadden and was prominently featured throughout his magazine and emulated by contributors and readers in their own pamphlets and publications. Despite his influence in spreading the “weak child” claim, Bernarr Macfadden was not the first physical culturalist to make such a statement about himself. Bernarr Macfadden’s early idol and inspiration, Eugen Sandow, was possibly the first physical culturalist to make the admission of being a weak child. Sandow, a Prussian strongman, whose renown in the modern world of physical culture and bodybuilding labeled him as “The Father of Modern Bodybuilding,” became a world-wide sensation in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s because of his well-proportioned frame and use of dumbbells and heavy weights in his system of physical culture. In his book of physical culture *Strength and How to Obtain It* (1897), under a section titled “My Childhood and Boyhood,” Sandow recounted, “As a child I was exceedingly delicate. More than once, indeed my life was despaired of. Until I was in my tenth year I scarcely knew what strength was. Then it happened that I saw it in bronze and stone. My father took me with him to Italy...I was struck with admiration for the finely developed forms of the sculpted figures of the athletes of old.”⁵ Bernarr Macfadden experienced a similar awakening to the love of the physical form after seeing Eugen Sandow pose at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exhibition in Chicago at the age of twenty-five.⁶ Macfadden most certainly owned a copy of *Strength and How to Obtain It* and saw parallels with his own early life.

⁵ Eugen Sandow, *Strength and How to Obtain It* (London: Gael and Polden, 1897): 89.

⁶ Robert Ernst, *Weakness is a Crime*, 17.

Bernarr Macfadden- A Brief Introduction

Bernard Adolphus McFadden was born August 16, 1868, in Mill Spring, Missouri.⁷ He changed his name to Bernarr Macfadden upon moving to New York in 1895 to start his publishing empire. He exchanged the “d” in Bernard for an extra “r” giving his first name the impression of a lion’s roar, dropped his middle name, and changed his last name to Macfadden because there were so many others McFaddens in the Midwest.⁸ His father William McFadden was a violent alcoholic, his mother Mary, unable to take care of Bernard and her three other children on her own, took him to St. Louis to live in an orphanage in 1874. As a young child he frequently suffered from debilitating illness. At the age of seven he was vaccinated against smallpox, using the traditional arm to arm method, and took nearly six months to fully recuperate.⁹ According to Robert Ernst, Macfadden’s biographer, young Bernard acquired his lifelong distrust of the medical community from this experience. Mary McFadden retrieved Bernard after three miserable years at the orphanage, but his freedom was short lived.¹⁰ At the age of nine his mother sent him to live in Mount Sterling, Illinois, to live with relatives who operated a hotel, and who apparently treated him poorly during his time there. Upon learning of Bernard’s mother’s death of tuberculosis in 1879 the hotel owner’s wife commented, “If you ask me, this one’s going to go the same way soon. He’s got all the symptoms. Consumption runs in the family.”¹¹ The hotel soon fell upon hard times and Bernard was entrusted to the care of a

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹¹ Ibid., 7.

local farmer, where he was put to work and learned of the increased vitality that proper diet and strenuous labor imparted upon the body.¹²

At the age of twelve he moved away from the farm to live with his Grandma Mary Miller in 1880.¹³ He worked as a clerk for a local general store and found that the sedentary life in St. Louis, unlike his active life on the farm, caused him to have headaches and his muscles to waste.¹⁴ He began exercising and bought a pair of fifty cent dumbbells after his uncle Harvey refused to pay his membership to the Missouri Gymnasium.¹⁵ His passion and practice of physical culture began to grow, and he eventually took up wrestling, for which he became moderately known in the Midwest. He made enough money to open an office in St. Louis as a “kinistherapist” (a made up professional title), a teacher of “Higher Physical Culture.”¹⁶ Although he made a modest living as a “kinistherapist,” Bernard saw his lack of formal education as a hindrance to his further success and he became an athletic trainer at the military academy in Bunker Hill, Illinois. He improved his writing skills and eventually published, after numerous failed attempts, his eighty-thousand word novel, “The Athlete’s Conquest,” a novel that fused romance with physical culture. He also experimented with diet while at Bunker Hill and developed into a staunch vegetarian.

After Bernard visited Chicago’s Columbian Exhibition in 1893 and witnessed the muscular display of Eugen Sandow on stage, he realized that he had broader goals to achieve.¹⁷ He traveled by train and boat to New York City, and rented two large rooms on Broadway which

¹² William R. Hunt, Body Love: The Amazing Career of Bernarr Macfadden, (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 7.

¹³ Robert Ernst, Weakness is a Crime, 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁷ Jan Todd, “Bernarr Macfadden: Reformer of Feminine Form,” Iron Game History 1, no 4,5,(1991): 4.

he used as living space and room for promoting his physical culture. He started advertising his systems in local newspapers, and changed his name to Bernarr Macfadden.¹⁸ He developed an exercise apparatus, a chest expander type instrument with springs, and eventually devoted all of his time to displaying it at sporting goods companies, but it ultimately failed.¹⁹ He decided to take a ship to England to sell his exerciser overseas in 1897.

Macfadden enjoyed a fair amount of success during his year-long tour of England. He posed in the style of Sandow in sandals and a leopard print loincloth against a velvet backdrop, selling his exercising apparatus and four-page fitness manuals he wrote, charging two shillings per lecture and performance.²⁰ According to Ernst, people were so impressed by Macfadden's fitness manual that they thought it was a magazine and asked for a subscription, Bernarr quickly realized that he had a huge opportunity for business.²¹ In 1898 he moved back to New York and rented an office on Gold Street in lower Manhattan and started the Physical Culture Publishing Company.²² The first issue of *Physical Culture* was published in March of 1899 and sold for five cents a copy; boldly declaring his personal mantra, "Weakness is a Crime, Don't be a Criminal."

Physical Culture soon became the dominant fitness publication in the United States, by December 1909 Macfadden claimed more than 550,000 readers (counting each copy as being read by five people).²³ What started out as a publication to sell his fitness apparatus grew into something much more. Macfadden advertised "natural" cures for every ailment, dietary advice, dating advice, crime fiction, and even a confessions column from readers within his

¹⁸ Robert Ernst, *Weakness is a Crime*, 18.

¹⁹ Ibid., 19.

²⁰ Ibid., 19.

²¹ Ibid., 19.

²² Ibid., 21.

²³ Ibid., 24. Macfadden may have chosen to count each issue as having five readers because they were often kept in gyms and other public facilities where multiple people had access to them.

publication.²⁴ Although this thesis mainly looks at Macfadden and his publication of *Physical Culture*, it is important to understand the extent to which his influence reached. He published hundreds of books and was at one point arrested by the Society for the Suppression of Vice for obscenity for publishing and displaying in public and in his magazines the athletic forms of the female body; it was considered an obscenity. He was ultimately pardoned by President Taft in 1908.²⁵ One really could go on for a while about his accomplishments and failures and the variety of industries he laid his hands on, but that would take many pages to do so.

Characterizing the Medical Climate in America: Antebellum through 1920s

The medical field in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not the spotless, sterile, nor the relatively trustworthy group of individuals and researchers it is considered to be today. You could go to the doctor with a stomach ache and he'd send you home with some morphine linctus or laudanum to take care of the problem.²⁶ That's not to say that health reformers advocating alternative medicines would have done you much good either. Say you have the same stomach ache, but you go to Samuel Thomson, one of the first alternative medicine advocates in America during the early 19th century, to find a cure.²⁷ It's possible he would give you an enema laced with cayenne pepper and call it a day. There is much conflicting literature between early health reformists and doctors during this period. Both factions, doctors and alternative medicine practitioners (which included physical culturalists), were getting some things wrong, and some things right, but often for incorrect reasons. With modern medicine in its infancy, coinciding with the rise of organized athletics in the United States, many conflicting

²⁴ Ibid., 26.

²⁵ Ibid., 49.

²⁶ James C. Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness*, 22.

²⁷ Ibid., 23.

reports and recommendations arose from both sides. It was ultimately up to the individual on where to get their treatment, either by going to the doctor and paying for an examination or paying for a self-hygiene manual to rid them of their ailments.

Before discussing eugenics, and Bernarr Macfadden's use of the "weak child narrative," present in his, as well as his contemporary's advertisements, it is important to characterize scientific medical knowledge, treatments, and ailments of the time to understand why the fear of being a "weak child" was such an effective tactic to market fitness to the consumers of these publications.

Natural vs Non-Natural Tradition

The first fundamental division between physical culture "experts" and doctors during the 19th and early 20th century was the idea of natural vs non-natural tradition in medicine. In modern terms, we would refer to this as a treatment vs public health model of healthcare. The term originates from Galen, who believed in the "naturals" (physiology) and the "nonnaturals" (habits formed, like personal hygiene).²⁸ Before the Enlightenment, medicine was a combination of these preventative measures and suggested treatments for ailments. Medicine in the 18th century had largely been focused on outlandish cures for common ailments, usually involving some sort of bloodletting to return the body to what they believed was homeostasis. It wasn't until the 1830's, with the empirical French school of Pierre Louis in which the field of medicine relied on careful observation of patients and diseases rather than intuition, that a public-health-oriented "non-natural" model of health occurred in America. Students who studied in Paris brought the knowledge back to America that ailments could be cured by properly prescribed personal

²⁸ Jack W. Berryman, "Exercise and the Medical Tradition" in *Sports and Exercise Science: Essays the History of Sports Medicine*, ed. Jack W. Berryman and Roberta J. Park (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 3.

habits.²⁹ Health reformers rapidly adopted this approach to disease prevention, but doctors remained divided on the issue. This natural vs non-natural model (treatment vs prevention) remains the primary point of contention between physical culture experts and doctors even today. Both sell the same thing, good health, but one does it with pills and potentially invasive treatment and the other does it by altering habit and lifestyle. While both fields had their own gems of truth, this competition for “patients” to buy their services seeded mistrust between doctors and exercise/health reformers.³⁰

While it may be evident that some of the “non-natural” medical practices of the age were dubious, the “natural” form of medicine advocated by Benarr Macfadden and other physical culturalists are not free from modern medical skepticism. Early physical culturalists and alternative medicine practitioners often operated as cure-all institutions, offering to be “all things to all comers.”³¹ For example, Dr. Isaac Jennings, William Alcott, John Kellogg, and Sylvester Graham emphasized that proper hygiene itself was enough to cure any disease.³² Like their social reforming counterparts, they advocated a moderate lifestyle free of vice (especially alcohol and tobacco). Their methods discouraged seeing medical doctors, even in cases where it would have been more beneficial to the patient to receive treatment via “non-natural” means. These early

²⁹ Ibid., 34.

³⁰ James C. Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness*, 114.

³¹ Michael Anton Budd, *The Sculpture Machine: Physical Culture and Body Politics in the Age of the Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 64.

³² Robert Ernst, *Weakness is a Crime*, 15. Sylvester Graham, inventor of the Graham cracker, was an advocate of a whole wheat diet, as during this time it was not uncommon for white bread to be adulterated with chalk to increase output. Graham and his beliefs on diet had significant impact on Benarr Macfadden’s own conception of diet. Dr. Isaac Jennings was a late 19th century doctor who advocated “Orography” (natural healing, via fasting and diet), also an influence on Macfadden. William Alcott was a writer and reform advocate of the mid to late 19th century who founded the American Vegetarian Society in 1850. For more information, see James C. Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness*.

health natural reformers laid the foundation for Bernarr Macfadden's own views on medicine and medical treatment.

Commonly Diagnosed Ailments in Medical Community (1830 – 1920)

With empirical medicine in its infancy during this time it's no surprise that diagnosis was as rudimentary as the tools they were using to examine patients. Unless you had a gaping hole from a bullet wound, or a heart that wasn't beating, every other ailment could generally be categorized as affecting either the nerves or the bowels.³³ Treatments and recommendations for these conditions were inconsistent to say the least. The following is a short list of the most common ailments of the general public diagnosed by both doctors and health reformers of the time. The list of common ailments was compiled from reading old issues and advertisements in *Physical Culture*, as well a list provided in Robert Ernst's biography of Bernarr Macfadden *Weakness is a Crime: The Life of Bernarr Macfadden*.³⁴

Neurasthenia

Neurasthenia is a generalized term for nerve weakness first noted by New York neurologist George Beard in the latter half of the nineteenth century.³⁵ The belief in the ailment was so common in America that it was jokingly dubbed "Americantitis" by psychologist William James.³⁶ The idea that the "nerves" somehow influenced the body was not new to modern medicine by any means, but the term coined by Beard gave the ailment legitimacy. It was a

³³ Beatriz Pichel, "Mary Hunter, the Face of Medicine. Visualising Medical Masculinities in Late Nineteenth-century Paris" *Medical History* 60 (2016): 579.

³⁴ Robert Ernst, *Weakness is a Crime*, 29.

³⁵ James C. Wharton, *Crusaders for Fitness*, 148.

³⁶ Greil Marcus, "One Step Back; Where are the Elixirs of Yesteryear When We Hurt?" *New York Times*, 26 January 1998, retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/01/26/arts/one-step-back-where-are-the-elixirs-of-yesteryear-when-we-hurt.html>.

catch-all ailment, born from the idea that modern society overstimulated the human body.³⁷ Symptoms included “flying neuralgias,” variable pulse, sweating hands, nocturnal emissions, ticklishness, or any sort of reaction that had no real obvious cause. Neurasthenia and the fear surrounding it created a market for doctors and self-help hygiene publishers like Macfadden, who would provide a laundry list of mundane symptoms in their literature to convince unwitting readers that something was wrong with them. Although the American Medical Association no longer considers neurasthenia a legitimate diagnosis, the World Health Organization still classifies the ailment in their ICD-10 systems.³⁸

Dyspepsia, Constipation, and Biliousness

While today we realize that most of the symptoms of neurasthenia are natural stress responses or bodily functions, the medical diagnoses of bowel disorders should be taken more seriously. The late nineteenth century was an era when people began to move from the country to cities in larger numbers. People no longer cooked their own food and the raw food material required to feed people was often scarce at times. Although sanitation was improved at this time in nations like the United States, there wasn't a Food and Drug Administration to supervise the quality and ingredients in food. White bread with coarse grain removed from it had become increasingly popular in the 1800's, and most families stopped manufacturing their own bread. It was not uncommon for commercial bread produced in cities at this time to cut their flour with chalk or plaster of Paris to increase their output.³⁹ The standard for factory manufactured food at this time was non-existent, and many people suffered digestive related issues as a result.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ World Health Organization, The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioral Disorders. <http://www.who.int/classifications/icd/en/bluebook.pdf>. (15 February 2017).

³⁹ James C. Whorton, Crusaders for Fitness, 47.

Dyspepsia

“Dyspepsia” is just an antiquated way of saying upset stomach. Despite the odd sounding name, Bernarr Macfadden was adamant about using laymen’s terms for common medical conditions.⁴⁰ He decried medical jargon, such as the use of “gastrodynia” for the same condition, although this term is equally odd sounding to the modern reader. In modern medical literature, it is defined as indigestion and stomach pain from diet, alcohol, caffeine and tobacco use, stomach cancer, gastroesophageal reflux disease, and swallowed air.⁴¹ The current lists for treatment of the disorder generally do not require medical intervention, they all revolve around changing some aspect of lifestyle, generally diet. A smoothly functioning digestive tract was a hallmark of masculine health according to Macfadden.⁴² The colloquialism “pep,” denoting vitality and mental alertness, is closely related to the term “dyspepsia”(like Pepsi, and Dr. Pepper, both originally sold as sour stomach cures and vitality boosters).⁴³ Physical culturalists, including Bernarr Macfadden, often linked healthy and regular digestion to the total proper function and vitality of the body.⁴⁴ To have an upset stomach was a sign of weakness and overindulgence.

⁴⁰ Robert Ernst, *Weakness is a Crime*, 22.

⁴¹ WebMD, Dyspepsia: Topic Overview. <http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/tc/dyspepsia-topic-overview> (15 February 2017).

⁴² Ana Carden-Coyne, *Cultures of Digestion: Diet, Digestion and Fat in the Modern World, American Guts and Military Manhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian Press), 77.

⁴³ Pepsi, the popular cola brand, derives its names from the same roots. It was also initially sold as a cure for an upset stomach and vitality booster. For more information visit The History of Pepsi Cola <https://web.archive.org/web/20010415161612/http://sodamuseum.bigstep.com/generic.jhtml?pid=3>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

Constipation

Although it would seem odd today to see advertisements in fitness magazines with “constipation cure, only 10 minutes a day” in bold lettering, early periodicals, including *Physical Culture*, were rife with advertisements and advice columns claiming to possess a certain set of exercises or a diet that promised a cure for constipation. Medical and alternative treatments for this illness ranged from tonics and specific movement regimes to objects sold for rectal insertion to alleviate the compacted bowels.⁴⁵ Constipation ads at the time (1900-1930) were as prevalent in health information disseminated by medical professionals and physical culturalists as weight loss-ads are today. Like dyspepsia, constipation was often linked to lowered “masculine” vitality in individuals afflicted by it.⁴⁶ Bernarr Macfadden attributed “weak men” and “unhappy marriages” to “weak men” who had the misfortune of “blood sapping disorders” of the bowel like constipation.⁴⁷ Bernarr Macfadden married multiple times during his life, so the efficacy of his advice on constipation was questionable.

Biliousness

Biliousness, as defined by early physical culture experts, was a condition of the liver that caused it to “overproduce” bile, usually caused by overindulgence of some sort. The importance placed on bile in early physical culture literature stems from dietary reformers like Sylvester Graham and the “natural” tradition, Hippocrates and Galen, who placed emphasis on the efficient intake and elimination of food from the body.⁴⁸ Biliousness as a condition was mainly the

⁴⁵ Ana Carden-Coyne. “Cultures of Digestion: Diet, Digestion and Fat in the Modern World” *American Guts and Military Manhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian Press), 79.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁷ “Manhood and Marriage” advertisement, in *Physical Culture* (July 1920), 134.

⁴⁸ Hippocrates and Galen believed in the “Four humors” of the body, black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm. It was believed that by observing the amounts of each of these substances in the body, one could gauge health and personality traits.

interest of physical cultural experts, who followed in the footsteps of the figures listed above. Bernarr Macfadden believed it could be treated through “citrus juice,” which would “right a physiological wrong” done.⁴⁹ The importance of the elimination of bile remains in modern homeopathic medicine as well.⁵⁰

Having any one of these chronic ailments of the time would have qualified an individual as “sickly” from a medical and a physical cultural (or natural healing) standpoint. Bernarr Macfadden’s “weak child” claim would have resonated with these individuals who experienced these symptoms due to improper nutrition and exercise in childhood (as Bernarr Macfadden himself experienced in his childhood).⁵¹ Although the medical community and physical culturalists were in consensus over what these common ailments were, they were at odds with one another over how and why they should be treated. However, both communities could agree on one thing: the importance of eugenics for the future success of America.

Understanding the Concept of Eugenics within Common Society, the Medical Field, and Physical Culture: Early 1900’s

When confronted with the word “eugenics” the one big name that seems to stand out among the rest is Hitler and Nazi Germany. Hitler and his chosen members of the Schutzstaffeln used the idea of racial hygiene to the absolute extreme. The killing campaigns in Germany and Eastern Europe, as well as the “Lebensborn” breeding program, meant to create a stronger race through selective breeding, are chilling examples of the ideas of eugenics taken to their most

⁴⁹ Bernarr Macfadden, “Fruits of Bodybuilding”, in *Physical Culture* (May 1905), 122.

⁵⁰ Biliousness Herbal Treatment, retrieved from herbpathy.com, (10 March 2017).

⁵¹ Robert Ernst, *Weakness is a Crime*, 5

deadly and extreme.⁵² The study of eugenics was pioneered by English and American scientists in the late 19th century. Similar to how the Nazi's used eugenic concepts in the 1930s and 1940s, physical culture experts and doctors used common eugenic beliefs to support their own ideas and sell whatever cure or process they were advocating. This section will outline the understanding and influence of eugenics from around 1900 to 1930 among three important groups, the general population, physical culturalists, and the medical field. How each group used or was influenced by it, and how eugenics involvement in the world of physical culture led to the development of the "weak child" claim among early mail-published strength entrepreneurs and magazines will also be examined.

Early Conception of Eugenics: General Population

The understanding of eugenic concepts among the general population was poor during the early 1900's. Bernarr MacFadden mentions this in an editorial in *Physical Culture*, citing that "eugenics, the science of race improvement, is practically unknown to the general public."⁵³ This is chiefly because Darwin's Theory of Evolution was still being heavily debated at this point and very few public outlets, barring universities, had this sort of information readily accessible.⁵⁴ From a strictly scientific standpoint, speaking of eugenics and the heritability of traits, most people believed that traits were inherited by offspring through some form of Lamarckism.⁵⁵

⁵² Arnd Kruger, "Breeding, Bearing, and Preparing the Aryan Body, Creating Supermen the Nazi Way," The International Journal of the History of Sport 16, no. 2 (1999): 34.

⁵³ Bernarr Macfadden, "Sacrificing the Innocent". *Physical Culture*, January 1923: 21.

⁵⁴ David Maski, "The Social and Legal Dimensions of the Evolution Debate in the U.S", Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/02/04/the-social-and-legal-dimensions-of-the-evolution-debate-in-the-us/>. (18 February 2017).

⁵⁵ Albert E Wiggham, "Can You Physically "Birthmark" Your Child?" *"Physical Culture"* January 1923: 23. Most people wouldn't have known what Lamarckism was by name, "old wives tales" about inheritance due to some physical event during pregnancy were just consistent with Lamarckism beliefs

Lamarckism, the theory that one organism could pass down a characteristic acquired during its lifetime to its offspring, was espoused by Erasmus Darwin in 1796 and then later expounded upon by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck in *Philosophie Zoologique* in 1809, stating that characteristics were either “acquired or diminished” during the organism’s lifetime.⁵⁶ If one were to have no understanding of the process of evolution and “survival of the fittest,” Lamarckian evolution makes the most sense, especially with the rudimentary, contradictory, and sometimes completely backward scientific knowledge available at the time. It is straight forward and easy to rationalize. The giraffe is the classic example of this, constantly reaching with its neck to reach leaves at the tops of trees, developing from a horse-like creature to its current form through many generations of neck stretching.

Even if the public didn’t know the concept of Lamarckism by name, its foundational principles factored themselves into pseudo-scientific superstitions that were perpetuated at the time. One good example of this is Joseph Merrick, also known as “The Elephant Man.” After developing horrific abnormalities after birth Merrick’s family ultimately attributed his unfortunate condition to his mother being frightened by an elephant while pregnant with him.⁵⁷ The actual extent of these beliefs is revealed in a 1921 article by Albert Edward Wiggam titled “Can you Physically “Birth- Mark” Your Child?” Wiggam remarks “I do not blame any one for believing in birthmarks. People have been taught to believe in them for untold ages.”⁵⁸ Even at this late point in time, Lamarckian beliefs were still prevalent within the general public.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Pietro Corsi, “Before Darwin: Transformist Concepts in European Natural History,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 32, no. 1 (2005): 67-83.

⁵⁷ David Sheward, “The “Real” Elephant Man: A look at the Life of Joseph Merrick,” <http://www.biography.com/news/elephant-man-joseph-merrick-biography>. (18 February 2017).

⁵⁸ Albert E Wiggam, “Can You Physically “Birthmark” Your Child?” *Physical Culture* January 1923: 23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

Lamarckism fit well with peoples' superstitions and allowed them to rationalize occurrences in nature that were, in reality, far more complex.

Even though the most prevalent belief among the general population regarding heredity was Lamarckism, this does not mean that ideas espoused by eugenics were not introduced to the public sphere. It is very rare that religion and science join to support a common concept, but this is the case with the public's exposure to the ideas of eugenics and its use within the world of physical culture.

The Social Purity Movement of the late 19th century is the link that begins to draw social concepts of eugenics from out of the scientific community into the public sphere in order to support their own beliefs and reforms. The Social Purity Movement was born out of a growing sense among Victorian era Christians that society at the time was endangering people with growing sexual immorality, with particular attention to the special needs of women and young children.⁶⁰ It existed within the same vein of Victorian era reform as the Temperance Movement. Actions deemed by reformers to be sexual perversion (homosexuality, masturbation, and any sexual act beyond that of God-sanctioned marriage) and vice (alcoholism and gluttony) were seen as deteriorating forces by these groups which sought to abolish them through education and reform.⁶¹

The Social Purity Movement, and other similar Victorian era reformers of morality, sought to expose the public to their beliefs through various organizations and clubs. The work that they did was largely public service. One of the most recognizable of these social

⁶⁰ Daniel J Kevles, "In the name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Use of Human Heredity," British Journal for History of Science 12, no. 2 (1998) : 252-254.

⁶¹ Sue Morgan, "Wild oats or acorns?" Social purity, sexual politics and the response of the Late-Victorian Church". Journal of Religious History 31, no. 2 (2007): 151–168.

organizations was the Salvation Army, founded by Catherine and William Booth in 1865. The Salvation Army was designed to help “bring physical and spiritual wellbeing” to homeless, alcoholics, prostitutes and other societal outcasts.⁶² These service organizations and clubs centered around social and sexual purity spread around the western world as more and more people began to view the life brought on by industrialization and growing urban spaces as degenerate forces.

Muscular Christianity was one of the offshoot movements born from this societal re-awakening. Like the Social Purity movement, Muscular Christianity advocated abstinence from corrupting forces (alcohol, sodomy, masturbation) and sought to aid in healing the morality of Victorian society. However, the key tenant of Muscular Christianity was the belief that organized sports and games, through the development of the body, taught important life lessons and developed good character and morals among Christian men. *Tom Brown's School Days*, a novel by Thomas Hughes, is credited with disseminating the movement.⁶³ Tom Brown, an athletic but stubborn individual, went off to school and played Rugby, through which he learned character building lessons and developed into a pious, masculine individual. The book changed on how athleticism was viewed in America, which was once considered a waste of time, and now considered a key component of masculine development.⁶⁴

Muscular Christianity is responsible for forging strong ties between organized sport and religion in the United States, Great Britain and Australia. Before organized play became associated with strong character within the Protestant faith, it was looked down upon strongly by

⁶² Sarah J Cruz, “An Enduring Mission” *Victorian Homes* 27, no 6: 68-72.

⁶³ Thomas Hughes, “Tom Brown's School Days,” 1857.

⁶⁴ Gerald Redmond, “The First Tom Brown's Schooldays: Origins and Evolution of “Muscular Christianity” in children's literature, 1762–1857.” *Quest* 30, no 1. (1978): 4-18.

ministers. In a pre-industrial era, what little time you had after you finished your work should be devoted to prayer and piety. As free time became inevitable with a rapidly industrializing society, Muscular Christianity removed the stigma from physical pursuits and paved the way for the longstanding relationship between organized sport and Christianity. Not only was sport and organized play allowed by Christianity now, the bodily development and drive to succeed, as well as the teamwork involved, were outward manifestations of good Christian character by most people in the areas influenced by this movement.⁶⁵

One of the longstanding bastions of Muscular Christianity is the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Founded in 1844 by George Williams in London, the YMCA provided a place for young men to grow in their faith by means of physical activity. Again, it was born out of George William's belief that if suitable activities were not found for young male transplants in urban areas, they would surely turn to brothels and bars during their free time.⁶⁶ The organization grew throughout Europe in the latter half of the 19th century and made its way to the United States where it became popular in rapidly expanding urban areas. Its rise parallels that of eugenics, not only by timeframe, but by compatible ideology as well.

As Muscular Christianity spread, a strong and well developed male body quickly became an outward sign of faith. Eugenics maintained that if a species was to survive it was in its best interest to breed those deemed "more fit" while simultaneously weeding out those deemed "unfit" in order to facilitate a more resilient posterity. The reason eugenics became a widely adopted ideology by many, including religious organizations, was that "fitness" was a relative and open term. From the modern understanding of eugenics and "survival of the fittest," the

⁶⁵ James C. Whorton, "The Medical Debate over Athleticism," in Sports and Exercise Science: Essays in the History of Sports Medicine, ed. Jack W. Berryman and Roberta J. Park (Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1992): 111.

⁶⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica, 20th ed., s.v "Young Men's Christian Association."

phrase generally denotes any characteristic that would impart survival and reproductive benefits among any individual of a species. However, as eugenic ideas begin to spread among the general populace, they were mainly used to reinforce the rigid social and moral behavior that these organizations promoted to their members. People who did not fit into the late Victorian society of the time - homosexuals, prostitutes, alcoholics and people of color – were declared unfit and a burden to the fit population. In the early 20th century, Muscular Christianity, in particular the YMCA, became one of these movements that brought eugenics out of the universities and into the public sphere.

Beginning in the early 20th century, the YMCA began to bring in guest lecturers to teach its members the principles of eugenics.⁶⁷ Members attended lectures titled “Heredity of Physical Character,” “Heredity of Mental and Moral Characteristics,” “Elimination of the Unfit,” “Race and Occupational Poisons,” and “Raising the Standard of Marriage.”⁶⁸ Fitness became a duty to God under this new system of Christian beliefs, and eugenics provided a structured and pseudo-scientific argument validating this line of thinking. Members of social clubs with Victorian reform minded leaders would certainly have been some of the first people within the general population to be exposed to ideas of eugenics. Because “fitness” was such a loose term and could be used to promote an ideal way of life through the guise of scientists and experts, eugenics and Muscular Christianity fit well with one another despite the historical rift that often characterizes science and religion. The fear of being labeled “unfit” in a Darwinian sense was very real, and eugenics provided a metric in which to place oneself on this scale. By failing to live up to these imposed physical and social standards you were failing both as a Christian and as a human being.

⁶⁷ Wa. Evans, “Dr Evans Talks on Eugenics at YMCA,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 13 November 1912: 3.
https://www.newspapers.com/clip/824811/eugenics_talk_at_ymca_chicago_1912/. (15 February 2017).

⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

Early Conceptions of Eugenics: Medical Field

Unlike the clear majority of the general population, doctors and other college educated medical professionals had access to literature with eugenic discourse. It is important to get an understanding of the medical knowledge and advice with regards to eugenics during the late 19th and early 20th century to compare/contrast it with that of “physical culture experts” such as Macfadden, to better understand how each formed its principles of “fitness” in order to meet their respective agendas.

The first major publication available for the field of eugenics was the *Annals of Eugenics*, founded and edited by Karl Peterson, a British eugenicist and colleague of Francis Galton, an early eugenics pioneer who coined the term “nature vs nurture.”⁶⁹ First published in 1894, Peterson’s research provided up to date information on patterns of inheritance and what traits were inherited. Like the Social Purity Movement, the aim of early eugenicists was to eliminate personality traits like pauperism, “feeble-mindedness,” and alcoholism.⁷⁰ Unlike other early social movements, which largely sought to eliminate these types of behavior through public service announcements and community involvement, eugenicists argued that the only way to rid the population of these negative traits was by selective reproduction, as these personality traits were thought to be inherited from either the mother or the father like eye or hair color. Peterson’s extensive research helped eugenics reach the broader scientific community.

⁶⁹ Garland E. Allen, “Eugenics and Modern Biology: Critiques of Eugenics 1910 – 1945”. *Annals of Human Genetics* 75, no. 3: 314 – 325.

⁷⁰ Albert Edward Wiggam, “Shall we Breed or Sterilize Defectives?” *Physical Culture* June 1921

As the ideas of eugenics spread around the world, subtle changes accompanied its travel.⁷¹ The first publication on the subject available in the United States was the *Eugenical News* first published in 1910 by Charles Davenport, professor at Harvard and the University of Chicago and member of the National Research Council. While Karl Peterson's research was cautious, statistical, and skeptical of the re-discovered field of Mendelian genetics, Davenport's was not. Davenport's publication contained little biometric analysis when compared with Peterson's work.⁷² Unlike *Annals of Eugenics*, *Eugenical News* reflected the strongly racialized and politicized eugenics movement in the United States. Many articles were published in regards to race, immigration, and forced sterilization laws. Examples of article titles from *Eugenical News* include: "The Mulatto," "War and the Race," and "The Treatment of the Feeble-minded."⁷³ Davenport was also heavily influenced by Mendelian inheritance, of which Peterson remained skeptical.

Davenport's publication represents the classic American concept of eugenics (the one ultimately adopted by the Nazi's), and his use of Mendelian genetics to justify his research represents a key difference in the field between the two nations. Mendelian genetics gave way to the "unit character concept" in eugenics, the idea that for every "trait" there exists a corresponding set of "genes," one that controls eye color, hair color, alcoholism, feeble-mindedness and anything else deemed a "trait."⁷⁴ By this logic, if two alcoholic parents have a child, it is certain the child will also grow to be an alcoholic because he inherited the gene

⁷¹ M.B Adams, *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil and Russia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 33.

⁷² Garland E. Allen, "Eugenics and Modern Biology: Critiques of Eugenics 1910 – 1945". *Annals of Human Genetics* 75, no.3 :314 - 325

⁷³ *Eugenical News* 4, no. 3 ,<https://archive.org/details/eugenicalnewsvo01offigooq>. (20 February 2017).

⁷⁴ K.M Ludmerer, *Genetics in American Society: A Historical Appraisal* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press 1972), 45.

from both of his parents. The “unit character concept” outright denies any possible environmental factors, including diet and exercise, when dealing with subjects of genetic studies. Davenport famously linked thalasophilia (love of the sea) as a Mendelian, sex-linked recessive trait found in the families of Naval Officers in a study published in 1919.⁷⁵ It ignored any of the “nurture,” from the “nature vs nurture” phrase and classified behaviors and other complex human processes as traits defined by as single discernable unit. American eugenics is characterized by this crass oversimplification of concepts, hindered by social and political agendas of those who produced the work.

While societal “others” (prostitutes, people of color, alcoholics and the physically/mentally challenged) bore the brunt of this new science through its beliefs that encouraged sterilization of those deemed “unfit,” misogynistic beliefs were also perpetuated in the medical world by eugenics, even by those at odds with the American version. Herbert Spencer, professor of Genetics at John Hopkins University in the early 20th century and author of *Popular Science Monthly*, was highly critical of Davenport’s use of the “unit character concept” and aligned himself more consistently with British eugenicists, yet still maintained archaic, Victorian notions on the mental and physical capacities of women.⁷⁶ Spencer used *Popular Science Monthly* to disseminate scientific research backing his own Victorian social beliefs as well.

⁷⁵ Charles Benedict Davenport and Mary Theresa Scudder, Naval officers: Their Heredity and Development (Washington D.C, Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1919). 47.

,<http://books.google.com/books?id=EWESAAAAYAAJ&dq=naval%20officers%3A%20their%20heredity%20and%20development&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁷⁶ Patricia Vertinsky, “Exercise, Physical Capability, and the Eternally Wounded Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century North America” in *Sports and Exercise Science: Essays in the History of Sports Medicine* ed. Jack W. Berryman and Roberta J. Park (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 184.

Herbert Spencer believed that the body was made with a default level of energy. By wasting energy on superfluous processes, one was disposing themselves to mental illness and disease. For men this included loss of vital bodily fluid through masturbation and “excessive sexual vigor”.⁷⁷ Men were able to control this through abstaining from these sorts of activity. Spencer believed that women lost energy in the same way, loss of “vital fluids,” but through menstruation, which he believed to be a chronic ailment but a vital process to reproduction. Since menstruation was a vital process that required great amounts of energy, any female who took up any sort of physical or mental training would be sacrificing her capacity for reproduction, which was seen by Spencer as a disservice to society. Women were obligated to this “reproductive sacrifice” to ensure the fitness of the race.⁷⁸ Here we see medical professionals using genetics and eugenics principles to support their own Victorian reasoning. By posing this ideology as a scientific observation, Spencer institutionalizes the practice of keeping women out of athletics and academia.

Medical experts and scientists during this time fed on the cyclic nature of eugenics and Victorian ideology. Eugenics was used as evidence to provide support for Victorian moralism, yet many of its key tenants were a product of that same set of beliefs. One fed off the other, creating a synergism between eugenics and Victorian moralism that tainted any scientific study claimed by supporters of eugenics, particularly the American eugenics espoused by Charles Davenport and *Eugenical News*.

Along with the speeches given at the Young Men’s Christian Association and other “Muscular Christian” organizations with which ideology meshed well with eugenics, there were

⁷⁷ Ben Barker-Benfield, “The Spermatic Economy: A Nineteenth-Century View of Sexuality,” *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 1:45-74.

⁷⁸ Patricia Vertinsky, “Exercise, Physical Capability”, 185.

other ways that the medical field disseminated eugenic principles to the public. A common medium for this would be health pamphlets and film. One of the most controversial and influential medical eugenic films made at this time in America was “The Black Stork,” produced in 1917 (re-released ten years later under the name “Are You Fit To Marry”).⁷⁹ The film was directed by and starred Dr. Harry J. Haiselden, chief surgeon at the German American Hospital in Chicago.⁸⁰ The story revolves around a character based on the doctor himself, who refuses to operate on the sickly child because the doctor believes he will grow up to have a horrible life. The child later grows up to be a monstrosity and returns to kill the doctors “who condemned him to life”. Since the concept of eugenics was not considered general knowledge to the public at the time, the film started with the doctor, his daughter, and her young fiancé. When the fiancé asked the doctor permission to marry his daughter, he shows the son a thoroughbred horse, which he used as an example to explain eugenics to an audience who may not be familiar with it. The stallion is juxtaposed with a weaker gelding to show the practical use of eugenics in producing stronger animals, as it intended to do with human populations. This horse analogy is important in linking medical ideas of eugenics with those of American physical culturalists, particularly Bernarr Macfadden, because it was also given as an example in their own literature, as the next section will display.

Early Conceptions in Eugenics: American Physical Culturalists

When discussing eugenics in physical culture, it is important to make distinctions between physical culture literature disseminated from America and literature of European origin,

⁷⁹ Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 12. Note the Darwinian use of the word “fitness” Charles Atlas’s fitness manual (discussed in the “Important Figures” section of this thesis, displays the same title “Are you fit to marry?” under his advice on marriage column in his fitness pamphlet, proof that he used the word “fitness” both in a Darwinian sense as well as a physical sense.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 12.

precisely because of the differences in American eugenics and British eugenics discussed earlier. While it is true that eugenics was a prevalent ideology in the British Empire, the practical application of the ideas never made significant headway in the political sphere. The only political victory for eugenicists in Britain was the “Mentally Deficient Act of 1913” which sought to segregate those deemed “feeble-minded” and “morally defective.”⁸¹ The bill initially included a provision for the forced sterilization of these individuals, but this provision was ultimately rejected by Parliament.⁸² This marks the drastic difference in the influence of eugenic ideas in American society, where the last forced sterilization was performed in 1983 by the Oregon Board of Social Protection (formerly the “Oregon Board of Eugenics”).⁸³ It was this politicization of eugenics that made it a larger social phenomenon in the United States, unlike in Great Britain where it largely remained isolated within the scientific community.

These differences in the way eugenics permeated the everyday social sphere through politics can be seen in the writings of physical culturalists in America versus those of the British Empire. Physical culture publications from around the British Empire in the Progressive Era do not include information about how to choose a spouse. Even if these British (or from territories controlled by Great Britain) were influenced by American publishers (such is the case with Syed Mohsen Alsagoff, discussed in detail in the “Important Figures” section of this thesis, notably displaying Macfadden’s “weak-child” narrative and mentioning Macfadden as an influence) there is a lack of marital advice and use of the word “unfit” outside a purely physical, non-Darwinian sense. Political actions taken to further eugenic principles in the United States were

⁸¹ Jayne Woodhouse, “Eugenics and the Feeble Minded: the Parliamentary Debates of 1912-14,” History of Education 11, no 2: 133.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸³ Governor John Kitzhaber, “Proclamation of Human Rights Day, and apology for Oregon’s forced sterilization of institutionalized patients” speech, (2 December 2002).

profoundly influential on society, and this influence is evident in the writings of Bernarr Macfadden and his American contemporaries.

Although Bernarr Macfadden was stalwart in his disdain for the American Medical Association, even going so far as to propose an association of non-medical practitioners of natural healing methods, his eugenic beliefs were shared, if not wholly influenced by the medical community and members of the American Medical Association.⁸⁴ In his 1916 book titled *Manhood and Marriage* Macfadden noted the decline of the health of the race brought on by modern society, citing, “We are living in a remarkable period. The developments of modern life and our disregard for nature’s laws have combined to produce a state of disease and suffering the extent to which will shock those not informed. Ask any doctor!”⁸⁵ Macfadden then goes on to define “the sex instinct” or desire to reproduce as “simply the race instinct, the instinct of racial self-preservation.”⁸⁶ It is very likely that Macfadden had heard and read lectures on eugenics and took them to heart, and to his magazine *Physical Culture*. Macfadden used the same example to explain eugenics to his readers as Dr. Harry J. Haiselden used in his 1917 film “The Black Stork.” When explaining the concept of “fitness” for perfect eugenic reproduction, he asked the reader to “Compare the spirit of the stallion with the mild qualities and lesser strength of the gelding.”⁸⁷ It is obvious through this parallel that Macfadden and members of the medical community were familiar with similar discourse on how eugenics should be explained to an uninitiated audience.

⁸⁴ Robert Ernst, *Weakness is a Crime*, 23.

⁸⁵ Bernarr Macfadden, “Manhood and Marriage” 1916. Pg v, <https://archive.org/details/manhoodmarriage00macf>. (12 March 2017).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

Although Macfadden and many of his contemporary American publishers were against the American Medical Association and the “quackery” of doctors, they were willing to share the same extreme beliefs on eugenics and racial hygiene by choosing the proper spouse. Because of the lack of political support for the eugenics movement in Great Britain during the Progressive era compared to America, British physical cultural publishers and other publishers from across its empire refrained from including any marital advice in their publications.⁸⁸ Support for the passage of eugenic laws in America brought the practice into the social sphere and consequently into American physical culture.

Early Eugenic Fears Surrounding Sports and Medicine

Along with the specific ailments that both the medical community and physical culturalists like Macfadden claimed to treat, there were certain fears surrounding athletics and organized sport that put the two professions at odds with one another. Modern medicine and modern organized sport and fitness, particularly in America, grew together, however, they were not always on friendly terms. Harvard College organized its boat club in 1844, and baseball, the American pastime, developed in the 1840's and evolved to something like its current form by 1850.⁸⁹ Prior to this point, there had been little research done to realize the effects of strenuous athletic training. While physical culturalists and others involved in new athletic fads (one of the biggest at that time was cycling) realized the importance and benefits imparted by strenuous athletic training, the medical community remained divided on the issue. This time period (roughly 1840—1920) also encompassed a time period of rapid industrialization and a sudden

⁸⁸ Out of the whole Ottley Coulter Collection in the Stark Center there was not one example of a non-American physical culturalist providing advice on marriage.

⁸⁹ Roberta J. Park, “Athletes and Their Training 1800-1914,” in Sports and Exercise Science: Essays the History of Sports Medicine, ed. Jack W. Berryman and Roberta J. Park (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 3, 70.

change in life from active agrarian to sedentary city dweller, prompting speculation in both fields on where and how a city dweller should exercise to compensate for lack of activity. Behind these speculations by physical culturalists and medical professionals there were elements of Victorian era reform (particularly Muscular Christianity) intertwined with the growing concepts from eugenics, that both sparked fear and support for the newly formed fitness industry. This section will outline common fears surrounding athletics and society at the time, to characterize the general population's understanding of athletic training and physical culture during the infancy of modern sport in America.

Physical Fears Surrounding Athleticism

As city dwellers and country folk alike took to recreational athletics due to the time afforded to them by a rapidly industrializing society with its time saving inventions and techniques, doctors, scientists, and physical culturalists weighed in on the merits and drawbacks of sport specific training. This section will present common physical fears espoused by medical experts of the time to characterize the variety of information and misinformation that circulated through the general public. Bernarr Macfadden and other physical culture publishers were working against this medical bias towards athletic pursuits, and his “weak child” claim alongside pictures of him in peak physical condition would have done much to convince his target consumers over the wild speculations of medical professionals who were skeptical of the benefits of physical culture.

Athletics and Neurasthenia

As previously described, neurasthenia was one of the most commonly diagnosed “catch-all” health issues at this time. It was used by both physical culturalists and medical experts to support and criticize the practice of sports and training in this era. One of the opponents of athletic training, George Beard, was convinced that excess physical strain drained the nerves of energy and led to a state of nervous excitement.⁹⁰ Beard believed that organized sport, especially in the city with its fast-paced way of life, dulled the nerves, and contributed to the American epidemic of neurasthenia. Beard maintained that neurasthenia could be treated by medical procedures, which infamously included static discharge of sparks to the genitalia (“Franklinization”), or electrodes inserted into the rectum or urethra.⁹¹ Beard was not alone in his thinking. Harvard University President, Charles William Elliot, shared Beard’s belief that neurasthenia could be linked with athletic exertion. In his 1893 Harvard President’s Report, Elliot made it clear that the physical and moral health of his students were in jeopardy due to athletics, the most notable culprit American Football.⁹² Eliot believed the intense excitement of sports drained the “nervous energy” of athletes and the brutality of the competition affected the nervous systems of spectators and participants in the same manner.

While some medical professionals, like Beard, maintained that there was a negative connection between neurasthenia and organized athletic sports, there were others who saw benefits in society’s newfound fondness for athletic endeavors. One of those was Edward Hitchcock Jr., an American physician who in the 1890’s noted the passage of America from the

⁹⁰ James C. Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness*, 149.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁹² Roberta J Park, “Physiologists, Physicians, and Physical Educators”. in *Sports and Exercise Science: Essays the History of Sports Medicine*, ed. Jack W. Berryman and Roberta J. Park (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992),139.

“Gymnastic Era” into the “Athletic Era.”⁹³ Hitchcock believed that natural setting of athletics, as opposed to the indoor routines common to gymnastics, were better for the individual participant.⁹⁴ Instead of producing neurasthenia, Hitchcock believed that organized athletics provided an outlet for the release for nervous energy brought about by a fast-paced industrial society.⁹⁵ Aside from the physical benefits of America’s newfound athleticism, Hitchcock also believed that sports were beneficial to the character of those who participated in them (via teamwork), and that a strong body was a sure sign of a strong character.⁹⁶ The key tenants of muscular Christianity are evident in this line of thinking, proving that even medical professionals were influenced by the movement, which was quickly gaining support in America.

Musclebound and Hyper-muscularity

Another fear that pervaded the medical community during the rise of athletics and physical culture was the notion that one could have too much muscle. A good number of physicians made little distinction between bodybuilders like Eugene Sandow, Bernarr Macfadden and college athletes like rowers and football players.⁹⁷ These physicians believed that the large muscles of these athletes were an evolutionary anachronism that detracted from the body’s ability to gain mental power which was necessary for life in modern society where brainpower was the hallmark of achieving success.⁹⁸ This thought process exhibits the same

⁹³ “Gymnastic Era” refers to the period in American history (mostly the 19th and early 20th century) when athletic training was conducted by German Gymnastic Athletic Groups (Turnerbunds) who practiced mass exercise regimes in a military fashion, Swedish Gymnastics is another example of physical culture in this “gymnastics” era America
⁹⁴ James C. Whorton, “The Medical Debate Over Athleticism”. In Sports and Exercise Science: Essays in the History of Sports Medicine, ed Jack W. Berrryman and Roberta J. Park Chicago (Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1992),110-111.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 111.

⁹⁶ James C. Whorton, The Medical Debate Over Athleticism, 111.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 114.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 114.

“economy of strength” model that professionals like George Beard advocated with neurasthenia, that the body was endowed with a certain amount of energy and superfluous activity drained energy that would have otherwise gone to better use. The dangers of “piles of parasitic muscle” that required “undue amounts of nourishment” were noted in popular medical literature at the time.⁹⁹

Athlete’s Heart

One of the common fears surrounding physical exertion in athletics and physical culture was the undue strain and “hypertrophy” many physicians believed was a direct result of athletics.¹⁰⁰ Their reasoning was linked to the fact that most people suffered cardiac arrest while exerting themselves physically in some way. With the advent of X-ray examination in 1895 and its medical applications, the size of the heart was observable without dissection for the first time. A break-through for the theory came in 1900 when a prominent London distance runner died of heart complications while training.¹⁰¹ Autopsy showed his heart ventricles to be extremely dilated, consistent with what modern medicine knows as heart disease, but at that time was given as an example that athletic exertion caused unnecessary hypertrophy of the heart. His death was chalked up to “Athlete’s Heart” and no consideration was given to the fact that he may have had a preexisting heart condition that predisposed him to cardiac arrest.¹⁰² The American Medical Association in its *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) published an article in 1897 supporting the theory of “Athlete’s heart” without making any attempt to study subjects at all.¹⁰³ This sort of anti-athletic fear even found its way into the U.S military. In 1911, Charles

⁹⁹ “The Dangers of Athletic Training” *American Medicine* 13, (1907), 500-501.

¹⁰⁰ James C. Whorton, *The Medical Debate Over Athleticism*, 116.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 118

¹⁰³ , “The Dangers in Competitive College Athletics”, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, (1897): 992.

Stokes, surgeon general of the United States Navy, published a report that found that athletic training of young men caused heart ailments in nearly a quarter of men enlisting, citing that athletics was “not in the best interest of the Navy.”¹⁰⁴

Fear of being declared physically “Unfit for Service”

Fear of the ailments above, as well as some not listed, weighed heavily upon the public in America. With the signing of the Selective Service Act of 1917, the American military’s definition of what constituted “fitness” for service became the concern of every young male in America. The full effects of this fear of being declared unfit for service are evident in physical culture literature at the time. In the “Influential Physical Culturalists” section of this thesis, there is an outline of a man named Louis Albizu, who marketed his physical culture system at people declared by draft boards to be “unfit for military service.” The fear of being physically unfit for service represents the culmination of the American Medical Association’s definition of physical fitness (as local physicians made up the draft board), and a chance in marketing for physical culturalists like Macfadden and Albizu to take advantage of the “weak child” claim. The social stigma associated with rejection from the military was enough to drive these men to commit suicide.¹⁰⁵ Soldiers who were declared “Class D” in WWI or “4-F” in WWII faced certain social death.¹⁰⁶ Sylvia Chalupsky, a native of Nebraska, explained that “nobody wanted to date these

¹⁰⁴ James C. Whorton. *The Medical Debate Over Athleticism*, 129.

¹⁰⁵ In the movie “Hacksaw Ridge,” directed by Mel Gibson, a historical drama about Private Desmond Doss, Desmond’s father, a WWI veteran, upon hearing his son is signing up for war in the Pacific Theater, tells his son that three of his friends went home and committed suicide after being declared “Class D,” or unfit for military service.

¹⁰⁶ Sylvia Iwanski Chalupsky, Interview regarding WWII Medical Denials, http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/frameset_reset.html?http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/stories/08010106.html. (2 March 2017). Class “D” (WWI) and “4F” (WWII) were the respective designations of a candidate for compulsory armed services who was classified as unfit to serve due to a number of physical and psychological ailments.

boys who didn't pass their physicals, and we called them '4-Fers.'"¹⁰⁷ The onset of war was a boom for physical culturalists and a bane for medical practitioners, as one group saw the extent of how unfit the male population of the United States was and the other saw an opportunity to market fitness to those who feared being declared "Class D" or "4-F" by medical boards.

Early Eugenic Fears Surrounding Athletics

If there was one thing American physicians and physical culturalists could both agree upon at the turn of the twentieth century it was that the white race (people of Western European descent) was going to be outnumbered by foreign immigrants with higher birthrates. This fear was publicized by President Teddy Roosevelt, who in a speech to the National Congress of Mothers in 1905, characterized the declining birthrate of "native Americans" (lowercase "n," not "Native Americans") as "a race that practiced racial suicide...conclusively show(ed) that it was unfit to exist, and that it had better give place to the people who had not forgotten the primary laws of their being".¹⁰⁸ Both physicians and physical culturalists in America took this message to heart; however, their interpretation of its application was contested between them over the merits of athleticism and exercise to the native American. This section will discuss their differing views on a central eugenic goal for the United States of America. A "weak child" had no place in an America where law, medicine, and physical cultural were inoculated with their own notions of how to preserve the "race" by strengthening it, physically and mentally.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Theodore Roosevelt. "On American Motherhood," March 13, 1915.

“Racial Suicide” Caused by Athletics

The same doctors and physicians who noted the dangers in athletics were the same ones who expounded the dangers of athletics to race and society. In an editorial published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) in 1903, a contributor noted that “comparatively few athletes marry. Of those that do marry, a small percentage have children. A large percentage are divorced by their wives, and it is doubtless true that not a few completely lose the instinct of the normal man.”¹⁰⁹ Participation in extraneous physical exertion was a crime against the economy of strength model of life these doctors possessed, in which energy necessary for other life processes (such as procreation) were lost. College athletics set the most able of suitors, the college graduate, up for failure to produce offspring for the sake of race. Another opponent of extraneous physical activity from the medical community noted that “the best athletes possess poorly developed sexual organs” because “severe athletic training and muscle building are at the expense of the nervous and glandular.”¹¹⁰ Medical opponents of physical culture and athletic training saw athletic endeavors as harmful to the integrity of the race they were trying to protect out of eugenic ideation.

“Racial Suicide” Redeemed by Athletics

The core of late nineteenth and early twentieth century theory of racial betterment in physical culture was based around the ideas of a British anthropologist and naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace. Wallace was credited with the theory of evolution through natural selection, and he published his work jointly with Charles Darwin in 1858.¹¹¹ Although not a eugenicist himself,

¹⁰⁹ “The Dangers in Competitive College Athletics,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 40, (1903): 993.

¹¹⁰ Edward Beall, quoted by Robert Coughlin, “The Use and Abuse of Athletics,” *Medical Record* 60, (1904): 485.

¹¹¹ Alfred Russel Wallace, “On the Tendency of Varieties to Depart Independently from the Original Type”, <http://people.wku.edu/charles.smith/wallace/chsdarwin.htm>. (3 March 2017).

Russel Wallace made a statement that resonated with physical culturalists and hygiene reformers who believed in the merits of clean living and exercise “the man of degraded taste or feeble intellect, will have little chance of finding a wife...On the other hand, the most perfect and beautiful, in body and mind, the men of spotless character and reputation, will secure wives first, the less commendable later, and the least commendable latest of all. As a consequence, the best men and women will marry the earliest, and probably have the largest family.”¹¹² American physical culturalists in the early 20th century, including Bernarr Macfadden, took the “in body” portion of “in body and mind” as well as “marriage” to its zenith. In addition to recommendations of exercise and diet, the early 20th century American physical culturalist often advised on how to pick and choose a proper spouse.¹¹³ In the “Important Figures” section of the thesis, there is a close analysis of a Charles Atlas manual that fully reveals this concern with marriage. Bernarr MacFadden published numerous manuals on marriage, including one titled “Manhood and Marriage” in 1916.¹¹⁴

The next thread connecting Bernarr Macfadden with the eugenics movement comes from an unlikely subject, Yale economist Irving Fisher. Aside from his important contributions to American economics, Irving Fisher was a passionate health reformer. His obsession with health reform started when he spent three years in a sanatorium (similar to the Kellogg School in “Important Figures” chapter) to cure his tuberculosis.¹¹⁵ Fisher was close allies with John Kellogg and Bernarr Macfadden. Kellogg described him as “a tireless steam engine” and “a

¹¹² Alfred Russel Wallace. “Human Progress: Past and Future” *Arena* 5 (1892): 157.

¹¹³ Bernarr Macfadden, Charles Atlas, and other physical culturalists were concerned with the proper marriage of individuals to ensure the “survival of the race”. More information on this is available in the “Important Figures” section of this thesis

¹¹⁴ Bernarr Macfadden, *Manhood and Marriage* (1916) <https://archive.org/details/manhoodmarriage00macf>, (4 March 2017).

¹¹⁵ Irving Fisher, “Does Tobacco injure the Human Body” (1924) *Readers Digest*.

wonderful advertisement for his own theories.”¹¹⁶ Fisher was also mentioned in Bernarr Macfadden’s own *Encyclopedia of Physical Culture Vol 1* in which he is cited by Macfadden in a study of the efficacy of a vegetarian diet.¹¹⁷ Irving Fisher believed “hygiene and eugenics should go hand in hand. They really are both hygiene—one individual hygiene and the other race hygiene—and both, eugenics—one indirectly through safeguarding the quality of the germ plasm and the other directly through breeding”.¹¹⁸ This statement along with the inclusion of marriage manuals in early 20th century American physical culture literature show the full extent to which the profession was a bedfellow with the ideas of eugenics. The next section will look further into individual “weak child” claims made by physical culturalists, as well as figures that who influenced the American public with their eugenic beliefs.

Important Figures in Eugenics and Notable “Weak-Child” Claims

This section of thesis is dedicated to the figures and establishments who were integral in propagating the “weak child” claim, as well as those who were influential with their use of eugenics and physical culture. This section will also serve as an introduction to eugenic beliefs of early physical culturalists and health reformers who advocated eugenics, and created conditions which would make the “weak-child” claim a powerful marketing tool when combined with eugenic indoctrination of the American public on medical, physical cultural, and legislative fronts.

¹¹⁶ James C. Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness*, 204.

¹¹⁷ Bernarr Macfadden, “MacFadden’s Encyclopedia of Physical Culture” Vol 1. Pg 368 Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books?id=_kJHAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA368&lpg=PA368&dq=irving+fisher+and+bernarr+macfadden&source=bl&ots=NNvZVQca5I&sig=g6fPdRG8ks1PxTbtucCcJKtiqSU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiGvdOY_ZDTAhUT2WMKHUgXD4sQ6AEIIDAC#v=onepage&q=irving%20fisher%20and%20bernarr%20macfadden&f=false.

¹¹⁸ James C. Whorton. *Crusaders for Fitness*, 196.

Louis Albizu

Louis Albizu was an early physical culturalist from America, active during the 1920s. He published a promotional manual for his exercise system, the “Albizu System of Physical Culture,” in a pamphlet titled *They Made Me Ashamed of Myself*.¹¹⁹ The name alone speaks to the same insecurities of weakness Bernarr Macfadden was targeting with his “weakness is a crime” mantra and his “weak child” claim. The first lines of this pamphlet speak to the common fear of being unfit for the military due to weakness in the early half of the 20th century. “Bands blared. Flags waved. Men and women cheered. Men—miles of men—marched by, rifles aslant their shoulders, equipment jangling and clashing... I should have been one of them”.¹²⁰ He later reveals that he was discharged from the army in 1918 due to his weakness.¹²¹ He claimed that he was once “a weakling—unfit to do my part as a real man!” He recycled Bernarr Macfadden’s claims of once being a weakling to entice insecure readers to consider his program. It should be noted that in this description of himself, he used the word “unfit” not as a word to describe his current level of physical fitness (he already admitted to being a weakling), but in more of a Darwinian sense. Clearly through the use of the term “unfit” in Albizu’s pamphlet, it is obvious that “fitness” was a term that people in the 1920’s conflated with the genetic contribution of the individual. Like early Macfadden publications, Albizu included photos of himself in loincloths and gladiator sandals to display the musculature he developed through his system. Albizu also borrowed more from early Macfadden publications, urging his readers to send in their own success stories for publication in his subsequent literature.

¹¹⁹ Louis W. Albizu, *They Made Me Ashamed of Myself*. New York (1926): Ottley Coulter Health Pamphlet Collection.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

Syed Mohsen Alsagoff

Although not an exact contemporary of Bernarr Macfadden, Syed Mohsen Alsagoff was heavily influenced by him. Alsagoff was born in 1914 in Singapore, the son of Syed Mohamed Bin Omar Alsagoff, Justice of the Peace and leader of the Arab Community in Malaya.¹²² Syed Mohsen stands as an example of the international influence of Bernarr Macfadden and his publication *Physical Culture*. Alsagoff was the founder, editor, and publisher of *Super Physique Magazine*, a publication which he claimed to have readers “all over the world.”¹²³ *The Story of My Life* is organized as a semi-autobiographical pamphlet explaining how he came into physical culture and bodybuilding, followed by success stories and columns of advice for specific groups, including women, young men, and fat people.¹²⁴ Alsagoff mentioned being told as a child by a doctor that he “had a weak heart and needed looking after,” which bothered him greatly as he wished to play like other children.¹²⁵ He credited two phenomena to explain his magnetism towards bodybuilding: the circus, and a copy of Bernarr MacFadden’s *Physical Culture* magazine, which his “childish passion for pictures made him to admire and gloat upon” the images of well-formed bodies in the publication.¹²⁶ Without Macfadden’s magazines Albizu speculated that “he would have lived a sulky weakling brooding a fast approaching end”.¹²⁷ He even went so far as to say that what he did “in the Orient” was hopefully comparable to Bernarr Macfadden did in America. While unable to prove or disprove that Alsagoff was a “weak child,” his decision to include this anecdote about his life was

¹²² Seyed Mohens Alsagoff, *The Story of My Life by Seyed Mohsen Alsagoff*, Singapore (1947): Ottley Coulter Pamphlet Collection.

¹²³ Ibid., 1.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 27-28.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 19.

absolutely influenced by Bernarr Macfadden, as he lists him as one of his greatest influences.

Unlike Bernarr Macfadden, Albizu included pictures of students and admirers of various ethnicities.

Paul Anderson

Paul Anderson was an American weightlifter born in Tocca, Georgia, in 1932. He is known for beating the Russians in the +90 kilogram weight class (heavyweight) during the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia.¹²⁸ The American public hailed Anderson a hero for this accomplishment; it symbolized a victory for American democracy against the Communist Soviet lifting team during the Cold War Era. Although not as well known for his published material as Bernarr Macfadden, Anderson also published strength manuals, including *Strength, Health and Success Can be Yours: The Worlds Strongest Man Tells You How*.¹²⁹ On the first page of this document, Anderson claimed in bold lettering, “I was not BORN to be the World’s Strongest Man.”¹³⁰ He described how he was diagnosed with “Bright’s disease” by a doctor, and given no hope to live.¹³¹ He did this to dispel any rumor that he was “born strong.” To back up this claim, he included a picture of himself as a prepubescent boy. He looked just as any boy would at that age, a wiry frame without well-defined musculature. Anderson borrowed from Macfadden’s weak child claim in his attempt to be successful in the physical culture market (not that he needed it, he was already a celebrated Olympian). Unlike Bernarr Macfadden and his contemporaries, Paul Anderson did not attempt to shame the reader into buying his book due to

¹²⁸ Jim Murray, “Paul Anderson: Superman from The South,” *Iron Games History* 3, no. 5: 10-12

¹²⁹ Paul Anderson, *Strength, Health, and Success Can Be Yours: The Worlds Strongest Man Tells You How*. United States (1967). Ottley Coulter Health Pamphlet Collection (note: part of the pamphlet has been cut out with scissors, some important information may be missing).

¹³⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹³¹ Ibid., 2.

“fears of being unfit.” His reasons for strength, “for developing the kind of body YOU would like to have,” shows the importance being placed on individual happiness rather than begging the reader to conform to a standard dictated by society, i.e. not to be “unfit.”¹³² This transformation in marketing strategy represents a shift away from eugenic principles that permeated society and urged people to conform to a certain standard of fitness in the Darwinian sense.

Charles Atlas

Born Angelo Siciliano at the turn of the 19th century, Siciliano, like Macfadden, later changed his name, to Charles Atlas to better promote his bodybuilding career.¹³³ Atlas was a close follower and friend of Macfadden, who named him “the World’s Most Beautiful Man” in a competition publicized in an issue of *Physical Culture* from 1921.¹³⁴ His connections to Macfadden are inarguable. The first page of each pamphlet by Atlas found in the collection bears a striking resemblance to Macfadden’s own publications, the classic “Atlas bearing the world” pose on the front cover contrasted on the other side with a scholarly picture of Atlas at a desk answering client and fan mail.¹³⁵ Two pamphlets bearing the same title but published eleven years apart, 1929 and 1941, use nearly the exact same appeal to gain followers. Both editions include Atlas’s famous claim of being “a 97-Pound Weakling” before becoming “The World’s Most Perfectly Developed Man,” however the 1941 edition displays this claim in bold letters, while the 1929 edition displays it in smaller lettering under a shirtless photo of Charles Atlas.¹³⁶ Both editions also include a picture of Bernarr Macfadden’s certificate that he presented to Atlas

¹³² Ibid., 7.

¹³³ Robert Ernst, *Weakness is a Crime*, 114.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹³⁵ Charles Atlas, *Everlasting Health and Strength by Charles Atlas*. New York (1929). Ottley Coulter Health Pamphlet Collection UT Austin.

¹³⁶ Charles Atlas, *Everlasting Health and Strength by Charles Atlas*. New York (1942). Ottley Coulter Health Pamphlet Collection UT Austin.

when he won the 1921 Physical Culture Exhibition prize for “World’s Most Perfectly Developed Man.” Both editions of the pamphlet contained sections on the importance of marriage, however the way they are worded are very different.¹³⁷ The 1929 edition was titled “Are You Fit for Marriage” while the 1941 edition was titled “The Most Important Human Relationship...Marriage.”¹³⁸ The 1929 edition gives strongly worded advice that is borderline, if not entirely, eugenic in nature. Atlas boldly claimed “If you are sexually weak, if your vitality has been drained, if you have been sowing your wild oats, if you are tainted by some blood disease you have absolutely no right to marry some pure, sweet, innocent girl, and pass on your weakness to your offspring.”¹³⁹ It is obvious that Atlas knew his audience had some understanding of genetic inheritance and eugenics, and by mentioning it in his manual meant to strike fear into those who are worried about being labeled “unfit” for marriage in a Darwinian sense, not necessarily a physical one. Passing on weakness to offspring is not mentioned in the marriage page on the 1941 edition of *Everlasting Health and Strength*. The most critical statement made by Atlas in the pamphlet warned “not only does the man who is sickly and nervous make a poor impression when he is seeking marriage, but his health after marriage leads to constant bickering and dissention.”¹⁴⁰ Atlas placed emphasis instead on a man’s own happiness, “my system...helps put a man in proper shape to make this most important human relationship of marriage the happiest and most satisfactory experience in life” instead of “perfect parenthood” as described in the 1929 edition over a decade earlier.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Ibid., (1929 and 1942).

¹³⁸ Ibid., (1929 and 1942).

¹³⁹ Ibid., (1941): 17.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., (1942): 28.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., (1929, 1941). Atlas also dropped his crusade against doctors and organized medicine in the 1941 edition of *Everlasting Health and Strength* and even went so far as to mention PhDs as credible sources, in the 1929, he claimed that “I will show you How to Prevent Disease” and “save you many dollars...and doctor bills.”

William Keith Kellogg

William Kieth Kellogg was an American industrialist of food manufacturing, a physical culture enthusiast, as well as a contemporary of Bernarr Macfadden.¹⁴² Besides the cereal brands he is still known for today, Kellogg founded the Battle Creek Sanatorium, as well as the Battle Creek Normal School of Physical Education, which opened in 1903, operated until the Great Depression, and functioned primarily as a health resort. People paid Kellogg a fee so that they could board, eat, and take classes on proper living. Both institutions were in Kellogg's hometown of Battle Creek, Michigan.¹⁴³ Kellogg's Battle Creek Normal School of Physical Education made no attempts to hide any ties to the science of eugenics.¹⁴⁴ Under the subheading "Purpose," the bulletin stated, "The Battle Creek Sanatorium is fundamentally an educational institution. Its purpose is not only to heal the sick but to teach the principles of Race Betterment through Eugenics and Biological Living."¹⁴⁵ Under the same subheading it also warned, "Students who are not disposed to do this (conform to requirements), will not be considered suitable persons for training to go out as representatives of the aims and ideals of the school and promoters of Race Betterment."¹⁴⁶ Under the "Ideals" the bulletin stated, "It is expected that the graduates of this School shall be living examples of the wonderful results of physical training and biologic living and that each graduate will become an active promoter of the great movement for race betterment." Graduating women "will be given exceptional opportunities for developing

¹⁴² James C. Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness*, 208.

¹⁴³ Benarr Macfadden opened a similar "Healthatorium" in Hudson, outside of New York City, in 1900. In 1903, Kellogg's magazine editors commended Macfadden's efforts on making their old line of work seem "new and attractive," even though they were competitors for the same market see pg 39 in Robert Ernst's "Weakness is a Crime: The Life of Bernarr Macfadden".

¹⁴⁴ Battle Creek College Bulletin, Kellogg School of Physical Education. Battle Creek, MI (1923). Ottley Coulter Health Pamphlet Collection UT Austin

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

and perfecting such natural qualifications as they may possess to reach the high ideals and standards of the College.”¹⁴⁷ Although the Battle Creek Normal School offered opportunities for women to learn and grow, including lectures in science, economics, and business as well as a gymnasium, swimming pool, and various other amenities for an active life, its primary goal remained what it termed “racial betterment.”

Alfred J. Briton

Alfred J. Briton was an English physical culture publisher ca. 1910-1930.¹⁴⁸ It wouldn't be a leap to say that he was a colleague of Bernarr Macfadden, from the style of photos in the booklet he may have been familiar with Bernarr Macfadden's tour of England and his “Great Briton's Perfect Woman Contest,” in which Bernarr named and ultimately married winner Mary Williamson.¹⁴⁹ Unlike Macfadden, Briton's mail order system claimed to be “endorsed by doctors.”¹⁵⁰ However, Briton includes an article titled “The Strongest Men in the World Were One Weaklings.”¹⁵¹ He listed the following people: Eugene Sandow, “who started life as a consumptive,” Edward Zello, a man who could lift “400 lbs with one finger” but led tombstone makers to “sharpen their chisels,” due to being considered a “class A prospect” by undertakers upon his birth; Jim Corbett, a “consumptive at the age of eight” now a heavyweight champion;

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁸ Alfred J. Briton, *How to Acquire Muscular Strength and Development*. London (ca 1920). Ottley Coulter Health Pamphlet Collection UT Austin.

¹⁴⁹ Upon a ruinous spell in his career in 1910, Bernarr Macfadden traveled to yet again England to reinvent himself. He advertised and held a contest to find “Britian's Most Perfectely Developed Woman”. The winner of the contest, Mary Williamson, married Bernarr Macfadden after the competition. It is interesting to note that she herself had “triumphed over childhood weakness” for more information see Robert Ernst's “Weakness is A Crime: The Life of Bernarr Macfadden” pg 54.

¹⁵⁰ Alfred J. Briton, *How to Acquire Muscular Strength and Development*.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 2.

and Victor A. Stewart “ the image of Sadow” who was not once but “twice pronounced dead!” by doctors upon his birth, and “actually placed in a coffin.”¹⁵²

Dr. A.C. Cotton

Dr. A.C. Cotton was a pediatrician from Chicago and member of the American Medical Association.¹⁵³ He gave a lecture to the Bryant School on November 3, 1913 titled “Lecture on Eugenics for Men Only.”¹⁵⁴ Cotton draws on elements of the muscular Christianity movement to relate the importance of being a “manly man” to his audience “in all these things the man should be held to the front and anything mean and unmanly should always be held in contempt....This is developed in manly sports of the high school boy and the college man to win a game which is worthy of manly effort to overcome the opponent by his skill and not by subterfuge or treachery.”¹⁵⁵ This is not the first time synthesis between Muscular Christianity and eugenics has taken place. Dr. Cotton defines manhood in the speech as having “projected oneself into the future” that is, marriage and children as the ultimate path to manhood. Cotton noted also that “the improvement of the race is the highest achievement.”¹⁵⁶ Dr. Cotton used the analogy of the thoroughbred stallion vs the castrated gelding. The rest of the lecture focused on puberty and the medical importance of abstinence before marriage, bolstered by Dr. Cotton’s anecdotes of having treated children who were stricken with venereal disease by their parent’s, especially their father’s, lack of education on the transmission of such diseases.

¹⁵² Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁵³ *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, 55 (1910): 61

¹⁵⁴ Dr. A.C. Cotton, *Lecture on Eugenics For Men Only* (Copy). Chicago (1913). Ottley Coulter Health Pamphlet Collection UT Austin

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 4.

Dynam Institute

The Dynam Institute was a company (or person, no name of a specific author is mentioned anywhere in the booklet) based out of London in operation during the 1940s.¹⁵⁷ The rhetoric in their pamphlet appealed mostly to vanity, and promised the “admiration of women” and “new respect” from men.¹⁵⁸ Similar to Macfadden’s publications, the Dynam System promises to eliminate “constipation, indigestion, biliousness and constipation.” The Dynam institute declared, “Strength is acquired—It is not a ‘gift’.”¹⁵⁹ Claims such as “many of the strongest men were once puny and weak,” “the strong man is made ---NOT BORN,” and “there are very many instances where men who later became veritable “mountains of muscle” began life under severe physical handicaps” were sprinkled through the text. The author of this booklet took the “weak child” claims of these strongmen seriously, but put a heavy emphasis on the work they put in to achieve their great strength.

George F. Jowett

George F. Jowett, born 1891, was a British born strongman, lifting champion, and international physical culture publisher.¹⁶⁰ He fell into a fire at the age of eight and was told by doctors that he would not live to be fifteen.¹⁶¹ At the age of eleven his uncle took him to see an exhibition by Eugen Sandow, where Jowett was inspired to pick up bodybuilding after hearing of Sandow’s similar weak childhood. He moved to New York City where he started an international physical culture publishing company. The pamphlet in the collection is undated however;

¹⁵⁷ Dynam Institute, *How to Build Muscles*, London (1940). Ottley Coulter Pamphlet Collection UT Austin.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶⁰ Kathleen Lawry, A Brief Biography of George F. Jowett. <http://www.davidgentle.com/ironindex/jowett.htm>. (30 March 2017).

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

judging from the model Chevrolet car parked on top of a man's chest in the back of the manual, the author's guess puts it around 1940 or later.¹⁶² This places Jowett in the later category for "weak child" claims along with Paul Anderson. Jowett does the reverse of what most physical culturalists did when pitching the weak child claim. Jowett omitted any mention of himself as a weak child, and instead presents his pupils as weak children: "A few of the Thousands of Success Stories of Jowett Pupils: Weaklings Become STRENGTH CHAMPS!" Jowett presented pictures of five people, supposedly his pupils, all claiming to have been exceptionally weak using phrases like "tiny skinny wippet-type youngster," "greyhound type," and "100 lb. weakling." Jowett's pamphlet is an interesting example of "weak child" advertisement because it presents the pupils, rather than the writer of the fitness program, as weak children.¹⁶³ This method called attention to the efficacy of his training system.

Charles J. Phelan

Charles J. Phelan was a strongman and physical cultural expert based out of Brooklyn, New York, circa 1920. The fitness pamphlet that he published, *It's Easy to Grow Strong Day by Day*, is very short, just a single page folded in half to create four pages front and back.¹⁶⁴ The front pictured the author performing a two-finger lift of a train axle while listing his measurements and feats of strength off to the side. Inside, the manual contains exercises organized by body group. On the back of the pamphlet Phelan included a short, "My Life Story"

¹⁶² George Jowett. *How to become a Muscular He-Man*. New York (ca 1940). Ottley Coulter Pamphlet Collection UT Austin.

¹⁶³ I was able to find an earlier manual from Jowett in the Ottley Coulter Pamphlet collection, *Nerves of Steel Muscles like Iron* (ca 1930), in it there is a section titled "The Next Generation Depends on Your Fitness" containing rhetoric about fitness for marriage, however, he fails to include any mention of "race" as Atlas did in his section on marriage from around the same time. The older booklet (1930's) appeals to consumers by branding them "weaklings" who are in need of a system of physical reform.

¹⁶⁴ Charles J. Phelan, *It's Easy to Grow Strong Day by Day*. New York (ca. 1920). Ottley Coulter Health Pamphlet Collection UT Austin.

section, in which he confessed, “although as a child I was never very strong, I was not, however, a sickly child.” Clearly Phelan was well acquainted with this claim, but it is hard to tell from his rhetoric whether he took “weak child” claims by other physical culturalists seriously or if he included this anecdote in his short pamphlet to show that he was not a liar or truth stretcher to his prospective pupils.

Albert Edward Wiggam

Albert Edward Wiggam was a frequent contributor to *Physical Culture*. He was a journalist who published articles and books about popular science, particularly eugenics.¹⁶⁵ His racist publications advocating the superiority of the Nordic race were responsible for the eugenic immigration restriction legislature of the 1920s.¹⁶⁶ He published a yearlong series of articles dealing only with eugenics that appeared monthly throughout 1921 in *Physical Culture*. A brief bio given on Wiggam in one of the articles described him as “a Chautauqua lecturer, having not only an exceptional gift of gab, but a wonderful sense of humor, which combined with a thorough grounding in science, has given him a unique position in his field...we were searching for a few years for the right man to write a good series of popular articles on eugenics, and when we found Edward Wiggam, we grabbed him.”¹⁶⁷ Among the series of articles he wrote were articles titled: “Can You Physically Birth Mark Your Child?,” “Birth Control, A Two-Edged Sword?,” “Proving And Measuring Heredity—With Twins,” “Can You Mentally Birthmark Your Child,”

¹⁶⁵ William R. Hunt, Body Love: The Amazing Career of Bernarr Macfadden (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 30.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 30.

¹⁶⁷ *Physical Culture*, September 1921, 23.

and “Should I Marry a Blond or Brunet.”¹⁶⁸ Albert Edward Wiggam solidifies the connection between Macfadden, eugenics, and eugenic legislation,

The figures detailed in this section are just a few of the notable examples of people who made use of the weak child claim, as well as auxiliary figures who influenced the use of eugenics in society and in physical culture. When combined with the eugenic agenda of American medical professionals and politicians, the “weak child” claim made by the American physical culturalists in this section posed a challenge to the readers of these systems of physical culture to remain fit for the sake of preserving America from forces that challenged its eugenic goals.

Conclusion

Hugh Genics did it! With the help of Bernarr Macfadden’s *Physical Culture* and the chest expander and dumbbells he purchased from a pair of ads inside, Hugh was able to transform himself from a weak, sickly, lanky young man into masculinity personified. His biceps grew four inches in circumference and his chest circumference expanded a whopping eight inches. He was able to alleviate his constipation by purchasing bulk gluten cakes and whole grain biscuits from a Kellogg ad in *Physical Culture* as well. With his new diet and exercise regime, Hugh’s neurasthenia cleared up on its own, without the use of medication. On the day of his physical for armed service at his local medical board, the physician examining him remarked on his outstanding physique, “This country needs more men like you, strong, fit to serve your country, a fine specimen of your race!” After basic training Hugh Genics was shipped off to fight in the trenches of Europe, where his luck would soon end. While digging a new series of trenches in

¹⁶⁸ *Physical Culture*, (September, November, August, July, November) 1921.

the hopes of breaking the enemy line, Hugh was hit by shrapnel from a barrage of enemy artillery pieces. Hugh suffered massive head trauma that impaired his speech and left him prone to sporadic epileptic episodes. With no use for him on the front lines, Hugh was sent back home to Virginia. Hugh Genic's life changed dramatically. Unable to find steady work due to his labored speech and epilepsy, Hugh was forced to panhandle outside the same drug store from which he bought his first issue of *Physical Culture*. He took up drinking, and frequently drowned his sorrows in a bottle of bourbon. The drug store owner finally had enough of Hugh scaring away customers and called local law enforcement to take him away for good. Hugh was sent to the Virginia State Epileptic Colony in 1920, as he was deemed "feeble-minded" by court physicians and the local judge due to his epilepsy. Upon the passage of the Virginia Eugenic Sterilization act of 1924, in the hopes of removing his "feeble-mindedness" from the gene pool, Hugh Genics was strapped to a gurney, wheeled into an operating room, and forcibly sterilized by doctors.¹⁶⁹

The glorious rise and tragic downfall of our fictitious friend Hugh Genics both hinged on eugenic fears that were perpetuated in society by medical professionals, physical culturalists, and eugenic legislation in the United States. Hugh's own anxiety about being unfit for American society was spurred by Bernarr Macfadden's use of these eugenic fears to sell his own publications, particularly the "weak child" claim, which resonated with Hugh. Hugh's pursuit of becoming the perfect man, fit to serve his country and race, ultimately led him down an unfortunate path where he would experience the darker side of the eugenic influence on American society. Was Hugh Genics a "criminal" under Bernarr Macfadden's personal mantra

¹⁶⁹ *Virginia Eugenic Sterilization Act of 1924*, 20 March 1924, text retrieved online from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Sterilization_Act_of_1924.

“Weakness is a Crime: Don’t be a Criminal?” According to the American legal system and doctors of the time, he was, even though he was injured fighting to prove himself for the same ideology that would later want him removed entirely from the gene pool.

There was no room for weakness of any sort in an America profoundly influenced by eugenics. If one did not conform to American society’s standard of being a white, law-abiding, productive, happily married, exemplary member of your race, there was a good chance that some of the eugenic laws, espoused by United States courts and supported by American medical professionals and physical culturalists like Bernarr Macfadden, could apply to that person. Hugh Genics is an unfortunate example of how American eugenics dictated the fate of many individuals, some, like Hugh, with no genetically linked illnesses whatsoever.

The pressure to conform to societal standards for the betterment of race, to prevent the supposed “racial suicide” that President Theodore Roosevelt frequently referred to, was supported by both doctors, physical culturalists, law makers, scientists, journalists, and anyone else who deemed themselves productive members of their race. These groups’ primary goal was to ensure that “native Americans” (people of Northern and Western European descent) remained in control of America by outbreeding people of “lesser races.”

If one was a “weak child” who grew into a weak, sickly adult, odds are he wouldn’t find a wife, according to Bernarr Macfadden and other contemporary American physical culturalists. He would be doing a disservice to himself, but more importantly, his race, by remaining a weak child and not building himself into a stronger, more ideal version of what a man should be.

Bernarr Macfadden wished to create a stronger race through his systems of physical culture, and the “weak child” claim was a wake-up call to those who identified with Bernarr’s experience of

being weak and sickly as a child, but more importantly, wanted to conform to the standards set out by an American society with distinct eugenic goals.

Biography

Hubbard M. Uhlhorn was born a weak, nine lb. infant on June 29, 1993 in Harlingen, Texas. He attended Harlingen High School, where he was a weak, 160 lb. young man who competed in soccer and tennis. His journey to strength began at Dave's Weight Club junior year of high school. He enrolled in Plan II Honors in 2012 and never declared a second major. He worked at Scott Douglass and McConnico law firm for his sophomore and junior year, and at the University of Texas IC2 Institute for his junior and senior year. Through his own system of physical culture he gained 45 lbs. of muscle during his college career, and was unofficially the strongest person in Plan II's graduating class of 2017 (he accepts any challenges to this claim). He plans to go to the beach this summer and think about his next big move.